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The Future of U.S.-Latin American Relations under President Donald Trump

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A Fledgling Presidency

With the publication of far-reaching executive orders, President Donald J. Trump is making good on the promises he delivered on the U.S. presidential campaign trail. From mandating reform on immigration and border security to walking back international trade and commercial agreements, the Trump presidency has drawn both ire and confusion from its counterparts south of the Rio Grande. The first 100 days of the Trump presidency have now elapsed, and much of Latin American society finds itself emboldened to take on the discordant rhetoric emanating from the White House. Many worry that a Trump presidency will usher in a cooling of North-South relations, or that the economies of Latin American countries will suffer from less favorable trade deals or taxation of remittances. However, the variable in this equation is the amount of attention given to Latin America by Trump. Will a Trump White House really promulgate all of their promised policies? Or rather, will they choose to pursue a policy of (benign or malign) indifference? As Michael Reid says upon analyzing Obama's relationship with Latin America:

For U.S. presidents, Latin America usually offers more frustrations than foreign policy triumphs. The region's leaders gripe about both U.S. interference and U.S. ne-

glect. Because it is not a source of strategic threats, Latin America languishes at the bottom of the United States' long list of foreign policy priorities (Reid 2015: 46).

What exactly the Trump presidency will mean for relations between the U.S.A. and Latin American countries (LACs) is still to be seen. Rather than jumping directly into rash prognostications and divinations without any context or base knowledge, this analysis would first benefit from an investigation into the things that are known: Obama's accomplishments and failures and the rhetoric that Trump vocalized during the presidential campaign. In doing so, one can distinguish points of departure between what has already been said and done and what might be enacted under Trump.

Out of his eight years as president, Barack Obama's most well-known Latin American foreign policy accomplishment would certainly be the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba. Two additional bilateral trade agreements with Colombia and Panama were also signed into force, and the Obama administration claimed some credit following the historic signing of the Colombian Peace Agreements, to which Obama had an envoy sent. President Obama also criticized the Maduro administration

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While it could be argued that the Obama administration should be held accountable for major failings in regard to its Latin American foreign policy, the one thing that President Obama can be conclusively credited with is his refusal to engage in the racially charged and xenophobic rhetoric disseminated by Trump.

in Venezuela for its undemocratic practices, even going through the motions of castigating the regime by means of international institutions, i.e. the Organization of American States (OAS). All in all, it can be safely said that Obama's tenure did not mark a substantial departure from the neoliberal/liberal internationalist policies of past presidencies. The bungling of the 2009 Honduran coup and subsequent provisional elections seemed like just another blip in a long line of dubious regime changes supported, whether implicitly or explicitly, by the U.S.A. (Reid 2015: 49). Not all of these aforementioned "successes" can be unanimously claimed as wins, however. What Obama heralded as an accomplishment, the Cuban opening, many viewed as a concessional sign of weakness and a betrayal of democratic values. More so, many have criticized Obama's failure to definitively act in regard to the Venezuelan quagmire. Obama's hands-off demeanor has also allowed China to cement their foothold in Latin American economies, which has subsequently resulted in an overall loss of U.S. influence on the continent (Reid 2015: 47-48). Furthermore, Obama oversaw the removal of some 3,094,208 immigrants during his tenure, more than the Clinton and Bush administration combined (Chishti/Pierce/Bolter 2017).¹ While this

figure should be presented in the proper context – Bush and Clinton had incredibly higher rates for border apprehensions and returns – it has not stopped the designation of Obama as "Deporter-in-Chief". Despite allocating funds for programs like Plan Colombia and the Mérida Plan, Obama also failed to recalibrate the failing "War on Drugs". While it could be argued that the Obama administration should be held accountable for major failings in regard to its Latin American foreign policy, the one thing that President Obama can be conclusively credited with is his refusal to engage in the racially charged and xenophobic rhetoric disseminated by Trump. This rhetoric, designed to provoke and dehumanize those residents who are in the U.S.A. without proper documentation or who possess Hispanic and/or Latino heritages, is undoubtedly one key difference between the two presidents (Aguilar Valenzuela 2017).

Throughout his campaign, and even into the first three months of his presidency, Trump has not been afraid to express the "politically incorrect". At a rally on June 16, 2015, Trump said "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best [...] they're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (Edelman 2016). A Tweet he sent in 2015 criticized Jeb Bush's outreach to the Latino-American community: "So true. Jeb Bush is crazy, who cares that he speaks Mexican, this is America, Eng-

¹ As Migration Policy says, the Obama administration also focused, "less on increasing absolute numbers of overall deportations and [put] a higher priority on targeting the removals of recently-arrived unauthorized immigrants and criminals. The administration also placed a much lower priority on removing those who had established roots in U.S. communities

and had no criminal records" (Chishti/Pierce/Bolter 2017).

lish!!!". It goes without saying that Bush's Spanish is misclassified, almost purposefully, as Mexican. A third example can be seen in his ad hominem attacks made against U.S. District Judge Gonzalo Curiel (Edelman 2016). Trump said that there was no way Curiel could remain unbiased in his hearing of the Trump University fraud case due to the fact that he, as a "Mexican", would be inherently against the wall Trump promised to build and would therefore be tempted to take his anger out on Trump via the courtroom (Edelman 2016). Irrelevant to Trump, apparently, was the fact that Curiel is a U.S. citizen, born in Indiana. While in office, he has stated his support for controversial and arguably inhumane plans, including the splitting up of Central American families detained after illegally crossing the border as an attempt to deter migration and the creation of an office that publicizes crimes committed by unauthorized immigrants: the latter being "a reflection of the old strain of American intolerance that brought us [the U.S.A.] internment camps and miscegenation laws" (The New York Times Editorial Board 2017). This short snippet of background information presented in the past paragraph has hopefully placed the comments and actions of the past two presidents in a comparative context. It should be noted that U.S. foreign policy on Latin America will not magically transform overnight, changing from good to evil. What is much more likely to take place are deviations to pre-existing policy: policies like the "War on Drugs" and immigration

restrictions, that latter of which claims a provenance that stretches back decades and includes multiple presidential administrations of both parties as supporters. Latin America can expect a more stringent retrenchment on these policies, along with a presidential rhetoric more forthcoming in its nationalistic and xenophobic tones. What now must be done is determine how rhetoric will transform into action and how ideas will become policy.

The lack of coherent policy or power hierarchies at the executive level combined with a revolving door of advisors mean that the actions taken by the Trump White House are difficult to predict at a structural level. Despite such uncertainty, however, Latin America has an alternative to the "wait-and-see" approach. Currently in the midst of a decade marked by enhanced regional coordination and economic cooperation, Latin American countries find themselves in a unique position to take on a possibly hostile White House. The existence of new opportunities is not something restricted to Latin America, however; the Trump presidency also finds itself in a position to enliven the relatively stagnant policy stances taken by past presidents of all stripes – should it feel obliged to do so. Realistically, the Trump presidency seems to portend the return of semi-isolationism and protectionism to U.S. foreign policy, but should the U.S.A. decide to abdicate its role of global arbiter, the subsequent power vacuum will surely not favor its global security and economic interests.

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Trump's Role in Latin American Politics

The question that this piece hopes to expound upon can be boiled down to the following: What does a Trump Presidency mean for Latin America, and what are the policy options available to Latin America in terms of mitigating a Trump presidency? Latin America is anything but a homogenous entity: that is clear. Recognizing the plurality and heterogeneity of Latin America, this piece hopes to stress the positive externalities that enhanced sociopolitical and economic cooperation can provide for the region. Moving further afield than protracting failed neo-liberal economic reforms, meaningful coordination could prove to be beneficial for a continent trying to balance its own oscillations between populisms from the left and right. With the creation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in 2008, the Pacific Alliance (PA) in 2011, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in 2011, Latin America has begun a promising, if not at least symbolic, process of deepening interdependency. While this interconnectedness cannot possibly neutralize a trade dependence on the U.S.A. that many South and Central American countries claim – a dependency that will certainly temper potential efforts of regionalization – Latin America can nonetheless seek out possible ameliorations. That is to say, while Mexico cannot incite a trade war with the U.S.A., Mexico's #1 import and export market, it can certainly look to expand its commercial reach southward and

amplify its cross-Pacific relationships.

Since the turn of the decade, the pink-tide that previously had swept over Latin America has receded. Leftist governments in Honduras, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil have all been pushed out of office, and center to right-wing governments have taken charge (Main 2017). In the next two years, nine Latin American nations will hold presidential elections: Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Paraguay, and Honduras. In the era of a Trump presidency, the fate of these elections could very well depend on the Latin American populisms fired up by the "caudillo yanqui" to the north (Tharoor 2017).² One such example can be found in Mexico, where Andrés Manuel López Obrador has seen his polls rise in the four months since Trump's election (Moreno 2017).³ In a poll con-

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² "Caudillo yanqui" is a dual reference to "caudillo" or the Latin American strongman ruler, and "yanqui" the Hispanicization of Yankee, a name used for U.S. Americans in Latin America.

³ Poll numbers can be found in this graphic provided by *El Financiero* through the following webpage: <<http://graficos.elfinanciero.com.mx/2017/encuestas/enc-01febrero17/index.html>> (08.05.17); the question that was asked of participants was: "Si los candidatos a la Presidencia de la República en 2018 fueran los siguientes, ¿por quién votaría usted? (% EFECTIVO)". In English, it can be translated to: "If the candidates for the 2018 election for the Presidency of the Republic were the following, for whom would you vote?". Since the PAN candidate had yet to be officially decided, the poll asked hypotheticals, wherein Zavala and Anaya were alternatively the nominated candidate, to gauge fluctuations in opinions across other candidates. Between November 2016 and February 2017, López Obrador gained four points in the polls, climbing from 29% to 33%, when

ducted by *El Financiero* between the 19th and 25th of January, 2017, López Obrador saw notable gains in popularity – regardless of the electoral field – when compared to the same survey in November of 2016 (Moreno 2017). Many attribute his rise in popularity to the populism that blossomed in the United States leading up to the 2016 presidential election. The anti-immigration, anti-Mexican, and overall anti-Latin American rhetoric that surrounded Trump's rise to power has only served to reinvigorate anti-U.S. sentiment in Mexico; "Trump – with his brash pledges to rewrite Nafta [sic] and stick Mexico with the bill for building the wall – has created the perfect climate for an anti-Trump south of the border" (Gamboa 2017; Cattán 2017). Riding the wave of discontent brought on by Trump's statements, López Obrador has moved to the front of the pack. Indeed, it seems that the Trump presidency will continue to have a palpable impact on the numerous elections occurring in Latin America within the next two years.

In conclusion, the political uncertainty in Latin America, as exemplified by Mexico, represents one of the many difficulties that the aforementioned international blocs and organizations must confront. CELAC and UNASUR are

Margarita Zavala was hypothesized as the PAN candidate. Zavala fell from 29% to 27% and Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong fell from 26% to 20%; in another poll, where Ricardo Anaya was hypothesized to be the PAN candidate instead of Zavala, López Obrador gained five points, climbing from 31% to 36%, whereas Anaya maintained 23% and Osorio Chong fell from 27% to 21%.

perhaps laudable attempts at initiating a regional dialogue, but their constituent countries have yet to imbue these organizations with any substantial power or capacities that can endure between presidencies. That is to say, the frameworks exist and are already in place, but there has not been an attempt to fully utilize the true potential of these institutions. Additionally, without permanent or binding institutions, new regimes and governments are in no way beholden to the resolutions drafted by these bodies. While possible solutions may lie in the regionalization of cooperation, the utility of these institutions should be taken with a grain of salt. For now, they are hopeful glimpses of what a more cooperative and integrated future might look like. The immediate future, however, appears to look a bit different; President Danilo Medina of the Dominican Republic said the following at the CELAC Summit that took place in Punta Cana in January of 2017:

The phantom of protectionism and closure of borders would have grave consequences. We must do everything we can to prevent a return to the past [...] We are facing an adverse international scenario. We need to stick together to defend our alliance (Newman 2017).

This need to "stick together" in light of "an adverse international scenario" might be something that these nations share, but with Trump's presidency kicking into high gear, it is a sentiment that must also be backed up with action.

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Looking Backwards: Comparisons of U.S. Isolationism and Nativism Across Time

Before diving into specific characteristics of a Trump-led Western Hemisphere, it is first worth the effort to contextualize Trump's promises and actions vis-à-vis an historical comparison. First, and most importantly, it is crucial to note that Trump's "America First" worldview is hardly a new phenomenon in the U.S.: while it may be extraordinarily short-sighted, it is not radical in any sense of the word. Before its use as Trump's rallying cry, "America First" was brandished as the slogan of a U.S. organization founded during the beginning of World War II that advocated for U.S. non-interference. Susan Dunn, a professor at Williams College, classifies the America First Committee as "isolationist, defeatist, and anti-Semitic" (Dunn 2016). Urging the U.S. government to appease Hitler, the America First Committee was willing to disregard the atrocities of fascist regimes if that meant avoiding entanglements in a war across the Atlantic. Similarities also abound between Trump's semi-isolationist and nativist policies and those of Hoover during the interwar period. The justification for decreased U.S. involvement on the global scale during the Inter-War Period bears striking, if not eerie, parallels to the modern U.S. American political context: "Disillusionment with World War I, international commitments that could lead to another war, and economic uncertainty discouraged ambitious U.S. involvement in global affairs

during the interwar period" (Office of the Historian 2017a). This economic uncertainty combined with the desire to protect U.S. producers and their goods soon coalesced into the Hawley-Smoot Tariff of 1930. "Raising the average tariff on dutiable imports by nearly 20 percent", the Hawley-Smoot Tariff garnered deep international resentment for the United States, "particularly [seeing] as the United States was an international creditor and exports to the U.S. market were already declining" (Eichengreen/Irwin 2010: 875). As the Great Depression worsened and international trade shrunk, the U.S. enacted one of the most protectionist tariffs in its history. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff, "provoked retaliatory responses, notably from its largest trading partner, Canada, as well as from a handful of European countries" (Eichengreen/Irwin 2010: 875). These types of reactions are unfortunately not relics of a distant past. As North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) renegotiations get underway via the inauguration of the Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) process, and as the U.S.A. steps out of the international "free-trade" limelight, the United States' protectionist past merits re-examination and recognition (Woody 2017). From January 1929 to January 1933, world trade fell from US \$5.3 billion to US \$1.8 billion – a contraction of 66% (The Economist 2008).⁴ Naturally, the Hawley-Smoot Tariff cannot bear all of the blame – the Great Depression and

⁴ Numerical values taken from figure entitled "Down the plughole" in the article appearing in *The Economist*. Data sourced from *League of Nations' World Economic Survey 1932-1933*.

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deflation were also root causes. However, it “certainly made a bad situation worse”, and led to the almost universal agreement that, going forward, a policy of free-trade would be in U.S.’s best interests (Bartlett 1997: 14-15). Whether or not this sentiment will endure through the rest of the 21st century is now up for discussion; if this mutually agreed upon strategy is upended by the Trump administration, the world economic order could begin to show signs of increased instability.

The analysis of the Inter-War Period by the U.S. Office of the Historian goes onto say that, “by the mid-1920s [...] a general feeling of economic uncertainty reinforced isolationist tendencies and encouraged new legislation that placed severe limits on immigration to the United States, particularly from Asia” (Office of the Historian 2017a). In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted, marking the first time in American history the government placed “broad restrictions on immigration” by barring Chinese laborers from immigrating to the United States (Office of the Historian 2017b). Over the following 35 years, this discrimination of the “Other” would only intensify, culminating in the Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924. These acts respectively barred, “entry [from] anyone born in a geographically defined ‘Asiatic Barred Zone’ except for Japanese and Filipinos”, and then excluded entry for, “any alien who by virtue of race or nationality was ineligible for citizenship”, which meant that in theory all Asians – includ-

ing those of Japanese and Filipino descent – and any person of Arab descent would be denied admittance to the United States on the basis of their race and nationality. While the Naturalization Act of 1870 allowed “aliens of African nativity and [...] persons of African descent”, to become naturalized, this act excluded all non-white, non-African persons from attaining naturalization, and therefore, it simultaneously excluded these groups (Asians and Arabs) from immigrating to the U.S.A. following the Immigration Act of 1924 (Office of the Historian 2017c; United States Code § 254 sec. 7 1870).⁵ These race-based restrictions would by and large remain in effect up until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (United States Code § 66 Stat. 163 1952).⁶ With a cursory look back into the United States’ past, this much is clear: the tripartite set of symptoms – nativism, semi-isolationism, and protectionism – described above seems to be re-emerging in a contemporary context.

Despite the recovery of the U.S. economy since the Great Recession, the country is still deeply unsure of what the future will bring. In 2017, the story is the same, it is just the players who are different: the Muslim Middle East and Mexico take the place of (East) Asia, and the Hawley-Smoot Tariff is replaced by the threat of

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⁵ United States Code § 254 sec. 7 (1870) available online at <<http://legisworks.org/sal/16/stats/STATUTE-16-Pg254a.pdf>> (08.05.17).

⁶ United States Code § 66 Stat. 163 (1952) available online at <<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-66/pdf/STATUTE-66-Pg163.pdf>> (08.05.17)

Rather than taking Trump's speeches as unadulterated truth, one must take Trump's public rhetoric and temper it with reality of the Trump administration. Rather than Trump holding unanimous decision-making power behind the U.S.A.'s relationship with Latin America, it is his team of advisors and cabinet members that will certainly take the reins in navigating this uneven diplomatic terrain.

huge hikes in import tariffs for Mexican goods, the U.S. withdrawal from future multinational Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and the renegotiations of pre-existing FTAs, such as NAFTA (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2017; Brander 2017). What makes these promises so troubling is not the lack of precedent, but rather that Trump is endeavoring to rehash century-old decisions within a drastically different global context. One can certainly debate the risks posed by the TPP to workers' rights and the environment and discuss the negative effects of NAFTA on a low income American factory worker. However, Trump's unilateralism and unwillingness to fully recognize the complex interdependencies at play make these decisions reasonably worrisome. Even though Trump may not advocate for an outright immigration ban for all Mexicans or Muslims, the restrictions that he hopes to place on the movement of certain ethnic and religious groups mark a pronounced departure from the last several administrations – though, as is seen, it is not without presidential precedent. When the aforementioned plans and orders are considered en masse, Trump's desire to positively and productively engage with Latin America is called into question. Many of Trump's adherents would argue these doubts are restricted only to the most liberal of U.S. American political circles, yet, the Latin American Right and Left are undoubtedly taking heed. On February 21, Javier Bolaños – the current president of the Mexican

Chamber of Deputies and member of the conservative National Action Party (PAN) – called on Latin American ambassadors to sound their, "clear and resounding rejection of all the xenophobic expressions from the president of the United States, Donald Trump" (Xinhua 2017). This call for a reignited Pan-Latin-Americanism in light of a Trump Presidency is in no way exclusively Mexican in origin. Calls for a consolidation in regional commercial and political organizations like the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), the Common Southern Market (MERCOSUR), and the Pacific Alliance (PA), have originated from many governments, both progressive and conservative.

Internal Dynamics and Power Hierarchies within the Trump Administration

Before diving into how Latin America can react to Trump's legislation and diplomacy, one must first try to forecast what exactly this legislation and diplomacy might look like. Rather than taking Trump's speeches as unadulterated truth, one must take Trump's public rhetoric and temper it with reality of the Trump administration. Rather than Trump holding unanimous decision-making power behind the U.S.A.'s relationship with Latin America, it is his team of advisors and cabinet members that will certainly take the reins in navigating this uneven diplomatic terrain. Who exactly makes up this team? With key posts in the State Department still empty, this is a question that continues to puzzle many. Therefore, it may

be best to start at the source of many of these questions: the National Security Council (NSC).⁷ Within the first 30 days of his inauguration, Trump fired the two most senior, experienced advisors on Latin America within the NSC: Craig Deare and Michael Flynn. Then, in a second wave of appointees, the older, tougher military brass arrived. Three weeks later, Trump nominated Gen. Rick Waddell of the Army Reserve to fill Deare's slot (Isacson 2017). Despite holding the position since early March, there is almost no news or information about this appointment on the internet. Rick Waddell, with experience as senior director for European Affairs for the Bush Jr. NSC, is no stranger to politics and the goings-on of D.C. Isacson likens Waddell to Gen. H.R. McMaster, Flynn's replacement as national security advisor. Isacson also points out that Waddell's literature indicates a personal penchant for low-intensity conflict and counterinsurgency campaigns, an analysis backed up by Dr. Gregory Weeks. It is quite possible that this proclivity will manifest itself in briefings given to President Trump concerning Latin America. According to Dr. Weeks' analysis of Waddell's only book to focus on Latin America, *In War's Shadow: Waging Peace in Central America*, he is a staunch opponent of applying dependency theory to Central America and denies categorizing U.S. actions in Latin America as imperialist (Weeks 2017). The concluding paragraph

of Weeks' article speaks volumes on Waddell:

Low intensity conflict had a major impact on Waddell, who kept writing about how the Army needed to adapt to new realities of conflict. As he concludes with satisfaction, "all too often freedom still proceeds from the barrel of a gun" (Waddell 1992: 205). And he's now advising the president on Latin America (Weeks 2017).

Alongside Waddell in the second wave of appointees stands Gen. H. R. McMaster. As national security advisor, he will hopefully speak truth to power within the Trump administration. He is known primarily for "writing the book" on Vietnam and for his extensive military involvement in the Middle East: not much is known about his views or opinions on Latin America policy, and it is therefore difficult to predict how he will affect the crafting of foreign policy. What these two appointments do show is the militarization of foreign policy creation. With so many civilian posts in State and Defense empty, it is the military that seems to be shouldering responsibility for foreign policy in the interregnum. Irrespective of their opinions and ideologies, however, these particular advisors fill consular roles within the NSC and possess no authority to dictate defense policy or foreign relations as Cabinet members do. The most these military officers can do is to advise the president – whether or not Trump will listen is the operative question. Apart from the inner sanctum that is the National Security Council, who seems to be stepping up on matters of Latin American affairs?

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⁷ The National Security Council is a conglomeration of advisors and officials that advise and council the president in matters of national security and foreign policy.

It seems, however, that despite the official charges entrusted men like Tillerson, Mattis, or Kelly, one of the most powerful foreign policy advisors to the President, the one with the President's ear, moves in circles entirely removed from the Cabinet: son-in-law Jared Kushner.

For one, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson seems to be at the forefront of engaging, and disengaging, with U.S. foreign policy on Latin America. In February 2017, Tillerson went to Mexico on a bridge-building trip. Ultimately, however, he was forced to defend Trump's proposals for the construction of a border wall, mass deportations, and the deportation of non-Mexican citizens to Mexico (Browne/Gaouette 2017). One might also look to Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly, a retired Marine Corps General, who accompanied Tillerson on his trip to Mexico. Kelly has been a vocal advocate for a stricter, more stringent border policy and is thought of as a member of the "Axis of Adults" within the Trump administration, just like Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis, who is also a retired Marine Corps General (Dozier 2017). It seems, however, that despite the official charges entrusted men like Tillerson, Mattis, or Kelly, one of the most powerful foreign policy advisors to the president, the one with the president's ear, moves in circles entirely removed from the Cabinet: son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Jared Kushner, the 36-year-old senior advisor to the president, has neither foreign policy nor governmental experience. Nonetheless, as the billionaire heir to a real estate empire, Kushner has been able to craft a niche position for himself within the administration of his father-in-law. A *Vanity Fair* article investigates the connections Kushner has to the administration and the roles

he plays, both officially and unofficially. The article says the following:

The source close to the situation said that Kushner, Tillerson, Mattis, and John Kelly are all working together as a team, and instead of seeing Kushner as a rival secretary of state, they view him as a honest broker between the president, foreign leaders, and Cabinet secretaries. So when Tillerson was preparing for his trip to Mexico last week, according to this source, the triumvirate of Kushner, Tillerson, and Kelly planned and executed this trip together. It was the three of them who briefed President Trump on the trip (Fox 2017).

Kushner is seen by many as a go-between for Trump. This applies not only to intra-White House affairs, but intercontinental ones as well. Fox goes onto say:

Foreign leaders began communicating with Kushner more than six months ago when it became clear that his father-in-law would be the nominee, and the relationships he's build with dozens of them have carried over into the White House, the source said (Fox 2017).

While Kushner's stance on Latin American policy is still undeveloped and unclear, he has nevertheless met with Mexico's Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray to discuss a major Trump speech and has tried to arrange for a presidential visit from Mexican President Peña Nieto: indeed, "Kushner's back-channel communications with Mexico – the full extent of which has not been previously reported – reveal him to be almost a shadow-secretary of state, operating outside the boundaries of the State Department or the

NSC” (Rucker/Parker/Partlow 2017). When the visit was later aborted by the Mexican president due to a controversial Tweet posted by Trump, Kushner was left fuming (Fox 2017). Unlike a seasoned politician, diplomat, or governmental official who flaunts published literature, Kushner is a total outsider; this makes him particularly difficult to position in relation to ideology or policy – especially vis-à-vis Latin America. There is no clear inkling what his views might be towards, say, Argentina or Colombia, Peru or Venezuela. What is clear, however, is that he – perhaps more than anyone else in terms of foreign policy – has the ear of the president, which means his ideas are crucial in gauging the future of U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America.

Alongside Kushner and Kelly in this so-called “triumvirate” stands Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.⁸ Before becoming Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson gained world-wide renown as CEO of ExxonMobil Corp. As the *New York Times* states, “neither a diplomat, soldier nor politician, he is an unconventional choice for the job, but has vast international experience” (Harris 2017). Such international experience includes, for example, being awarded the Russian “Order of Friendship” by Vladimir Putin – one of the highest awards given to foreigners – and getting in a tussle with Nico-

las Maduro following Venezuela’s nationalization of the petroleum industry, a decision that cost ExxonMobil some US \$10 billion and that Tillerson took as a personal affront (Egan/Horowitz/Isidore 2016; O’Reilly 2017). Despite this previous disagreement, however, Tillerson does not seem to have it out for Maduro (O’Reilly 2017; Latin America Goes Global 2017).⁹ He has also come out in favor of rolling back Obama-era regulations on Cuba and re-examining the U.S.’s support of the Colombian peace process and the resulting accords’ implementation (Latin America Goes Global 2017).

Regardless of the professed policy goals publicized by the administration and its constituent members, it is the everyday political realities of Washington that end up determining how and for what ends policy is formed – Latin American policy included. The dynamics in play within the president’s inner circle are crucial to understand how foreign policy will develop. While Kushner has the benefit of filling a flexible advisory role outside of the president’s Cabinet, Tillerson is encumbered by the bureaucratic apparatus that accompanies the State Department. In order to make this administrative behemoth function, it must have its working parts in place; that means that qualified civil servants must be hired to carry out the president’s foreign policy. This, however, could not

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⁸ The “triumvirate” refers to the quote from the Fox article in *Vanity Fair* and includes Tillerson, Kelly, and Kushner. This varies from the “Axis of Adults” which is comprised principally of Tillerson, Mattis, and Kelly and is referenced in Dozier’s article in the *Daily Beast*.

⁹ The latter is, according to Latin America Goes Global, “a text of the written answers on U.S. policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean Rex Tillerson submitted to the Senate for his confirmation hearing”.

It is said by multiple anonymous administration sources, according to an article in *Politico*, that Jared Kushner's interactions with foreign governments (Japan, Mexico, Israel to name a few), are "causing consternation at Foggy Bottom, as top State Department officials, foreign policy experts and embassy officials are frozen out of foreign policy decisions and often unsure who is doing what, or who is responsible".

be farther from the State Department's current position. To begin, Tillerson's senior staff at State is vacant – save a few acting holdovers from the Obama administration who are working on borrowed time (U.S. Department of State 2017).¹⁰ The Senate seems ready to begin the nomination processes for these much-needed officials, yet, as Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) says, "there's no one to speak on behalf of the Trump administration" present at any of these hearings (Kelemen 2017). Within the first 100 days in office, Trump has only had 27 key nominees successfully confirmed by the Senate. This statistic pales in comparison to 69 for Obama, 35 for G. W. Bush, 49 for Clinton, and 50 for H. W. Bush. (The Washington Post 2017). As of May 10th, 2017, the only positions requiring Senate confirmation that were filled in the State Department were secretary of State, the ambassador to Israel, and U.S. representative to the UN: five ambassadorships and the deputy secretary were awaiting confirmation, three more positions were awaiting official nomination, and 106 further positions lacked any prospective nominee (The Washington Post 2017). While Trump has nominated a deputy secretary of State, a move that took more than 12 weeks, John J. Sullivan still must be formally confirmed (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary 2017).

¹⁰ Although there are two positions currently filled out of the nine that make up State's senior staff, they are working on a provisional basis and are not permanent Trump appointees to said positions.

This means that the current status quo of Tillerson being the "only Senate-confirmed official selected by Trump anywhere inside the State Department building" will continue for some time (Gearan/Morello 2017). A major problem with this arrangement is that, "with assistant secretary of state positions occupied only by 'acting' deputies" many diplomats and foreign officials "have no one of authority to contact" (Gearan/Morello 2017). This nebulous chain of command is just one of several variabilities sapping the State Department of its international legitimacy.

In addition to the internal uncertainties, an external variable also seems to be clouding the State Department's current role. It is said by multiple anonymous administration sources, according to an article in *Politico*, that Jared Kushner's interactions with foreign governments (Japan, Mexico, Israel to name a few), are "causing consternation at Foggy Bottom, as top State Department officials, foreign policy experts and embassy officials are frozen out of foreign policy decisions and often unsure who is doing what, or who is responsible" (Stokols/Dawsey 2017). This lack of clear hierarchy or role specialization means that it is difficult to associate one or two people with the crafting of Latin American foreign policy. Additionally, with many career diplomats left out of the loop, there is no sense of constancy or reliability. While one would assume that a Cabinet-level position – i.e. Sec. of State Tillerson – would be the point person in relations

with diplomats and governments from the Caribbean and Central and South America, the limits of his influence are being discussed within many D.C. circles; these discussions first started as a whisper and are now being had at a yell. In a move unseen in modern administrations, Tillerson's State Department waited almost seven weeks to hold its first press conference. In fact, the first time he even sat down with the press, it was with one friendly journalist whom he hand-picked to accompany him on his East Asia trip mid-March. This one-on-one interview not only broke precedent upon precedent in terms of transparency and access, but also revealed that Tillerson neither sought after nor wanted the job of secretary of State (McPike 2017). While he may still be adjusting to this new position, his silence nonetheless speaks volumes: unless dynamics change, and change soon, it is possible that he will not be taken seriously by both the media and/or the administration. If that is the case, then his ability to conduct foreign policy on the part of the United States would be thrown into jeopardy.

An example of such a consequential exclusion might be the happenings of March 9, 2017, when Mexican Foreign Minister Videgaray came to Washington, D.C. and headed straight for the White House for a meeting with Jared Kushner and a couple of other advisors. Notably absent from this meeting was Videgaray's counterpart, Sec. of State Tillerson (Wilkinson 2017). When asked about the meeting, the Secretary of State spokesperson seemed to

have no idea that Videgaray was even in town (Wilkinson 2017). Even though Tillerson was said to have spoken to Videgaray by phone, it was nonetheless a case of bad optics for the Secretary of State. It did little to help the image of a closed-off secretary that continues to pop up throughout media and policy coverage. In Tillerson's defense, his supporters believe that he is treading lightly and making big gains behind closed doors, shunning the lime light and eschewing the cameras in order to "make the boss look better" (McPike 2017). Others say that it is far too soon to start throwing around judgments concerning his efficacy: a proper evaluation must be put on hold until more actions and statements are collected as evidence (Inboden 2017). Tillerson himself argues that much of business is done behind closed boardroom doors: foreign affairs, however, is not another iteration of a multinational company. Perceptions matter, and for diplomacy, perceptions are almost everything. In closing, one overarching conclusion is laid bare; moving forward, the power dynamic amongst the upper echelons of Trump's advisors and confidants will be of utmost importance if one is to assess the flow of influence within the administration. Depending on the flow of influence, distinct parts of the executive apparatus will in turn find themselves empowered to or forbidden from taking the reins in crafting Latin American policy.

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Demographic, Cultural, and Commercial Exchanges Between the U.S. and Latin America

The U.S.-Latin American relationship – or rather series of many bilateral and multilateral relationships – is made up of an enormous number of connections in which money, influence, ideas, power, and people flow in both directions, albeit perhaps not always with the same intensity. For centuries, the United States has played a major role in the economies and political regimes of Latin America: that is a fact. However, Latin America has also exercised a fair share of its influence on the U.S.A. via culture, language, and demography. As of the 2012 U.S. Census, 16.95% of the population identified as Hispanic (United States Census 2012). Additionally, some 12.9% of U.S. Americans, or ~37,579,787 persons, speak Spanish at home, and around 18%, or ~52,988,755 U.S. residents, are able to speak Spanish with some degree of proficiency (Ryan 2013; Tharoor 2015).¹¹ Furthermore, the Spanish Foreign Ministry and the Instituto Cervantes, released a report in December of 2015 that declared that by 2050, the United States “will be the leading Spanish-speaking country in the world” outranking both Spain and Mexico (Cervantes Institute 2015). A final example of the strength of Latin American and Hispanic culture in the U.S.A. can be seen in Americans’ television viewing habits: Univision and Telemundo, both U.S. American Spanish language broadcast networks, ranked 5th

and 8th respectively amongst the most watched ad-supported networks among adults aged 18-49 in 2016, with a combined viewership of over 1,600,000 people (Schneider 2016).¹² It is clear that in 2017, borders are porous, both for people and for culture.

The United States exists alongside Latin America in an international system characterized by globalization and deep inter-/intracontinental interactions. The “my way or the highway” policy that Trump favors will not function in 2017 – the world is no longer unipolar and the United States is continually losing international credibility, especially within Latin America. The world looks drastically different now than it did in 1989 following the fall of the U.S.S.R., and the current world order will simply not allow for the re-emergence of a unipolar power. In this day and age, the United States finds itself questioning, “whether it really needs to play the world’s policeman, whether peace really is always beneficial, and whether far-off conflicts really are worth wading into” (Baker 2017). If this is the case, what can Latin America do to avoid an “every-man-for-himself” type of strategy as the U.S. wrestles with its own international identity?

It would be naïve to say that Latin America can simply disengage from the United States. This is not possible now, nor has it been possible since the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine. Of course

¹² Data acquired from: Nielsen. Prime time total viewers, Live+7; Broadcast data: 12/28/15-12/4/16 and 12/29/14-12/6/15; Cable data: 12/28/15-12/18/16, most current, and 12/29/14-12/27/15.

¹¹ These are not exact figures, but estimations using given percentages.

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this assertion runs in the other direction as well: the U.S. cannot realistically construct an impenetrable wall between itself and Latin America that keeps people, language, and culture out while funneling through money. The two parties share a deeply interdependent relationship, and the

ance, but Mexico is crucial to the United States' economy as well. There are many intertwined markets and production chains, such as the auto industry, that rely on vibrant and voluminous trade between the two countries. This mutually beneficial and ever-growing relationship cannot simply be up-



Figure 1: Simoes/Hidalgo 2011.

quality of this relationship should be recognized so that pragmatic solutions might be crafted. For example, while Trump professes that he can dictate the renegotiation of NAFTA down to the tiniest detail and assumes Mexico must subsequently acquiesce because of its dependence on the U.S. American market, he overlooks the fact that Mexico is the U.S.'s number two export destination and number three import origin (Simoes/Hidalgo 2011). While the United States is an unarguable economic powerhouse, this vitality does not mean that the U.S. can interact with the world via a one-way, unilateral approach.

It may seem like Mexico is dependent on the U.S. for trade due to the differing degrees of trade reli-

ended because "America Comes First". Such a move would much more likely have the opposite effect by putting the U.S.'s position within deep production chains at risk. If NAFTA dies, the U.S.A. will see huge losses as intra-regional trade (in the form of foodstuffs), as well as trade with China (in the form of technology) and the EU (in the form of heavy machinery), is increasingly incentivized in Latin America (O'Neil 2017). Mexico is not the only nation that relies on the U.S. as a vital trade partner and export market. As is seen above, the United States makes up a crucial part of many Latin American economies, particularly those in Central America.

Many of these Latin American countries, especially in the North-

It may seem like Mexico is dependent on the U.S. for trade due to the differing degrees of trade reliance, but Mexico is crucial to the United States' economy as well. There are many intertwined markets and production chains, such as the auto industry, that rely on vibrant and voluminous trade between the two countries. This mutually beneficial and ever-growing relationship cannot simply be upended because "America Comes First".

The commercial relationship between Latin America and the U.S.A. is numerically significant, yet it does not preclude these countries from looking elsewhere for future partnerships and opportunities. Such an example would certainly be Chile, and this LAC's path could very well set the stage for alternative commercial diversification later on down the road.

ern Triangle Region of Central America, rely heavily on the U.S. as a crucial trade partner. Even Venezuela depends on the U.S.A. for commerce: a country that has adamantly vocalized their disdain of U.S. efforts to interfere in their domestic affairs. In light of these dependencies, these states cannot put this commercial relationship at risk, regardless of who sits in the Oval Office. Utilizing another analytical lens, it would also be in the U.S. president's best interests not to jeopardize the U.S.-Latin American trade flow – a trade flow that accounts for 23.2% of U.S. exports and 18.5% of U.S. imports (Simoes/Hidalgo 2011).

The commercial relationship between Latin America and the U.S.A. is numerically significant, yet it does not preclude these countries from looking elsewhere for future partnerships and opportunities. Such an example would certainly be Chile, and this LAC's path could very well set the stage for alternative commercial diversification later on down the road. As one of the Latin American countries most committed to free trade, along with Peru, Chile leads the pack in seeking out deepened international connections that broach the Pacific. On the 14th and 15th of March 2017, Chile hosted representatives from 12 countries that once formed the hoped-for TPP, plus China and South Korea, to discuss a path forward following the U.S.'s withdrawal and the agreement's subsequent demise (Shepherd 2017). Then in April of 2017, Chile convened a meeting of foreign ministers from PA and MER-

COSUR to discuss ways of further integrating trade. Finally, in January of 2018, Chile will convene a foreign ministers' meeting of the CELAC regional diplomatic group with China to talk about "more trade, more opening, [and] more regional integration" (Oppenheimer 2017). In light of China's presence in these high level meetings, Chile's Foreign Minister, Hernando Muñoz has said that, "history teaches us that when there are empty spaces in politics and in actions, those spaces are filled by other players" (Oppenheimer 2017). This "empty space" most likely refers to the absence of any senior U.S. trade official at these summits. The seemingly inversely proportional relationship between a rise in China's influence and a decrease in the United States' clout has more evidence than just representation at good-will summits, however.

Figure 2 shows the destination of South and Central American exports between the ten-year period stretching from 2006 to 2015. As can be seen, the U.S.A. receives exports from the South and Central American region at a comparable level to the amount of intra-region exports. In any case, the U.S.A. clearly leads China. It should be noted that between 2011 and 2015, total trade exports from the region to the world decreased some 29.12%, from US \$761,380 million to US \$539,655 million.

It is clear here that the U.S.A. leads China in importing goods from South and Central America in gross terms. What is essential

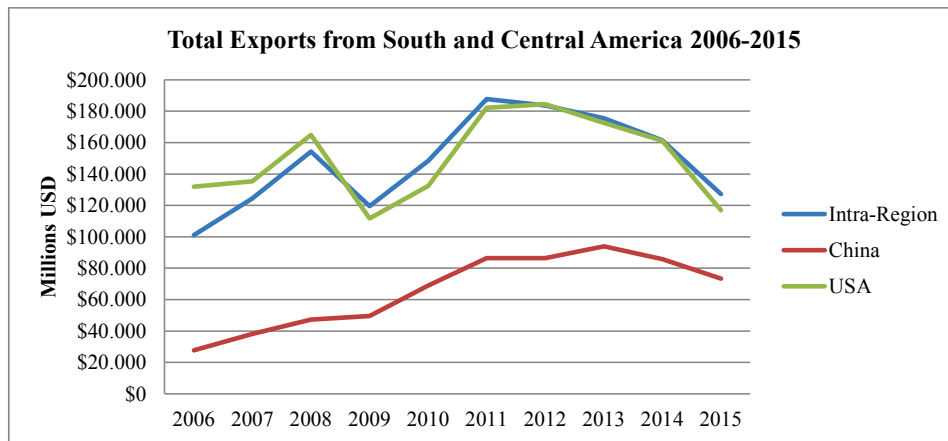


Figure 2: World Trade Organization Data; Time Series.

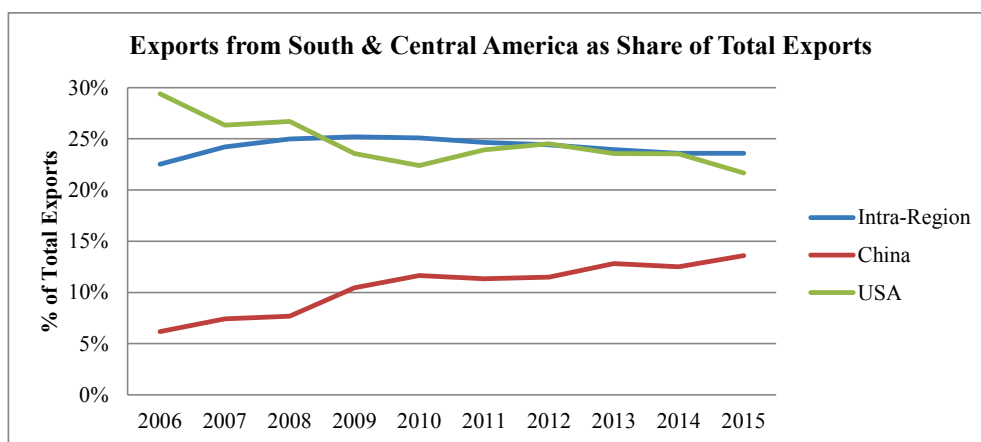


Figure 3: World Trade Organization Data; Time Series.

to examine though, is the change in the depth of both countries' trade relationships with Central and South America, i.e. in terms of comparative growth or retraction. Some attribute China's decrease in trade volume with Latin America as a sign of a Sino-Latin cooling, but they fail to take into account the comparative nature of said decrease. Figure 3 shows the share of exports received by each region, but this time, as a percentage of total exports to the world from the South and Central American region.

While in 2006 the U.S. received 29.39% and China received 6.17% of exports from Central

and South America, in 2015 those values stood at 21.66% and 13.60% respectively, which amounts to a decrease of 7.73% for the U.S.A. and increase of 7.43% for China. Even though in 2015, the U.S. was still a more profitable export market for South and Central America, the growth in the China-Latin American relationship is significant and seems to be on track to continue growing. In fact, China is now the biggest export destination for Peru, Chile, and Brazil (Simoes/Hidalgo 2011). Latin America is increasingly looking westwards for more lucrative trade deals, and with the numerous summits planned for this year and next,

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With US \$1.5 billion being allocated in the 2018 FY U.S. government budget for the construction of a border wall and a deep, multi-billion dollar cut in foreign aid, Trump has set the stage for the next year of his presidency. The following issues are all now in play, if not already in motion: the retreat from multinational institutions and international agreements; the doubt cast on the U.S.'s support of the Colombian peace process; the threat of tariffs, taxes, and diminished funding for Mexico; and the undoing of the Cuban rapprochement.

China is seen by some global economists to be taking the reins in the current global free-trade order (Pesek 2017). While some experts believe China cannot possibly fill the role of the U.S. in this neoliberal, transparent global economy, it has undeniably taken on a more powerful role in fomenting and guiding commercial growth within the South and Central American region (Holmes 2017; Capri 2017). The growth of Chinese influence vis-à-vis the U.S.A.'s diplomatic, economic, and social disengagement from the Latin American region exemplifies a sticking point for the Trump administration: a *laissez-faire* policy is no longer tenable in 21st century Latin America.

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panded influence over U.S.-Latin American policy. With most of Latin America considered as *terra incognita* to Trump, the LACs are confronted with a promising opportunity: "Latin American governments may do well to engage as a group on specific issues – such as energy or security – as opposed to a 'pure' bilateral basis, which may not be a priority for the new administration" (Winter 2017). For example, Paraguay is stronger with MERCOSUR than it is alone, Bolivia can attract more diplomatic attention through UNASUR than it can alone, and the Dominican Republic benefits from a louder voice in CELAC than it would otherwise. The strength, prosperity, and stability of Latin America are in the U.S.A.'s best security interests, as well. When Latin America can control drug trade and ensure rule of law and accountability, the United States undoubtedly benefits. How can Latin America convey these principles to the Trump administration? The next section will focus on strategies and options available to Latin America to further activate their role in the bilateral U.S.-Latin American relationship.

Charting a New Course: Latin America's Path Forward

Following Trump's victory in November, many Latin American presidents exhibited caution and reserve in their reactions, hoping to avoid provoking a negative response from the new U.S. commander-in-chief. Shortly after Trump's inauguration, at the 2017 CELAC Summit, Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa, said the following: "we have to protect our-

selves from the aggressive policy of persecuting migrants" (Newman 2017). Later, in an interview with Spain's Cadena Ser, he said that there needs to be, "a regional stand to defend the main type of mobility, which is human mobility, the defense of human rights, reminding the United States that they have been a country of migrants" (teleSUR 2017). Bolivian President Evo Morales said, via Twitter, that he hopes to work with Trump, "against racism, machismo, and anti-immigration for the sovereignty of our peoples" (Gonzalez et. al. 2016). Even though these statements appear to admonish Trump's plans, the more rebellious presidents were sure to avoid specifically mentioning Trump or attacking him personally, instead favoring a more indirect, though nevertheless pointed, approach. Other statesmen, like Manuel Santos of Colombia and Temer of Brazil congratulated Trump without qualification and clarified their interest in continuing to deepen bilateral ties between their nations and the U.S.A. (Gonzalez et. al. 2016). Almost across the board, Latin American presidents called for continued cooperation and tended to be scant on responses to his previous comments and promises. While Latin America was by no means behind Trump in the campaign, they opted for a pragmatic and muted approach following the announcement of Trump as the 45th president of the United States.

A common aspect of these reactions was a focus on the bilateral facet of their respective relationships with the United States. A

"bilateral relationship" clearly implies the existence of two players – not just one. As former First Lady of Mexico, Margarita Zavala said concerning Mexico's ties with the U.S.A., "there is no issue in the bilateral relationship that the United States can take on alone, whether it be migration, security, or climate change" (Gonzalez et. al. 2016). That is to say, while the U.S.A. may possess the preponderance of power in their bilateral relationships with the individual states that comprise Latin America, they do not possess a monopoly of it. In effort to further strengthen their positions vis-à-vis the U.S.A., it would be prudent of Latin America to think about ways in which they might combine and fuse their voices, when interests and opportunity windows align, so that they may bring more consequential thoughts and opinions to the table. With the "Great Negotiator" now sitting in the Oval Office, Latin America should use the multiple institutions, frameworks, and organizations that have already been established to project a more united voice in the conveyance of their nations' desired policies to the United States. It is crucial to note here that this call for increased cooperation is not a call for the creation of new umbrella institutions and trade agreements. The solution is not to throw more institutions and organizations at the problem. Rather, what might be the region's best bet is the utilization of already established institutions at sub-regional, regional, and continental levels – such as CELAC, UNASUR, MERCOSUR, PA, ALBA, etc. – in order to apply

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Like many Leftist Latin American politicians, Trump ran his campaign speaking out against the ills of neo-liberal globalization and the internationalization of economies. Both the farmer in the foothills of the Andes and the coal miner in the foothills of Appalachia are put at a disadvantage by globalization.

substantive pressure and signaling to the United States. Despite their youth and somewhat under-developed structure, these institutions have made some tangible gains in the last half decade and possess the capability to continue doing so.

From solving intra-regional disputes to strengthening the region's commercial profile in East Asia, these aforementioned institutions can play a role in the future of U.S.-Latin American relations. To do so, however, they all have to be willing to talk to the United States. While CELAC will dialogue with gusto with China and the European Union, it has not yet affirmed its desire to initiate dialogue with the United States. Until CELAC decides to do so, its full potential to play a hemispheric role will likewise be limited. In light of the uncertainty that hovers over U.S. foreign policy under Trump, Latin America would do well to shore up intraregional integrity and prepare to rely and support one another. With an uninterested – or, at a minimum, indifferent – U.S. president and a mutually shared – although not unanimous – consensus amongst the people and presidents of Latin America that more integration would be favorable, now is the time to activate these organizations in the way they were meant to be. It could very well turn out that unexpected affinities develop between formerly unsuspecting partners.

Finding Common Ground? An Argument for a Mixture of Optimism and Pragmatism

While the suggestions made above provide alternatives, Latin America cannot subsist on deeper intra-regional integration alone. Efforts must be made to engage in dialogue with the United States, by means of organizations and institutions mentioned above. As surprising as it is, the Left in Latin America may be able to dialogue with Trump just as easily as the Right. Despite his railing against Trump's rhetoric and immigration stances, Evo Morales sent out one remarkable Tweet on November 10, 2016, that clarified a convergence of ideologies between Trump and Morales. He tweeted, "Why did Donald Trump win? Because this was a vote against failed globalization and the barbarism of war, against the unhinged free market."¹³ Like many Leftist Latin American politicians, Trump ran his campaign speaking out against the ills of neoliberal globalization and the internationalization of economies. Both the farmer in the foothills of the Andes and the coal miner in the foothills of Appalachia are put at a disadvantage by globalization. This anti-globalization sentiment may be the entryway for nations like those belonging to ALBA to initiate a dialogue with the president, building upon shared opinions: Maduro himself said that "[Trump] won't be worse than Obama" (Crooks 2017). Critics of Trump from both the right and left have accused him of being a

¹³ Original Tweet available here: <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/796701346254778368> (08.05.17).

man without principles or ideology; if this is indeed the case, the Leftist character of ALBA member states should not preclude further agreements and deals between them and the United States. For example, who is to say Morales and Trump would never work together to defend human rights in the face of the “barbarism of war”? On April 18th, the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley “presided over what the [Trump] administration called the first ‘thematic debate’ on human rights in the Security Council” (Sengupta 2017). Bolivia, like the United States, is also a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, and perhaps this shared commitment coupled with the necessary opportunity window to facilitate cooperation can be taken advantage of by both countries.

In the end, however, Trump’s presidency will most likely not make or break Latin American administrations. Though his rhetoric may vary from his predecessors, his core policies will not. While he may disengage from certain international institutions and reduce aid packages that former presidents had promised, he will most likely maintain a steady and sizeable military presence in the region – especially considering his advisory staff is composed of almost entirely military men. The greatest threats to Latin America are not those emanating from Trump, but rather those of inequality, poverty, impunity, corruption, police militarization, and drug trafficking. These problems may not attract the attention of Trump, but they must be con-

fronted and dealt with by Latin American leaders themselves. That being said, Trump does possess enough influence in the region to tilt Latin American states in one direction or the other – as is seen in incremental gains in popularity of López Obrador in Mexico. With the pull he has over Latin America, Trump may not be able to play kingmaker, but he can play a participatory role by engaging some leaders while leaving others, namely Maduro, out in the cold.

With Trump’s “First 100 Days” now behind him, not much can be definitively said about what lies ahead for U.S.-Latin American relations. Prognostications and recommendations can of course be made, but the variability of Trump’s actions and the developments in domestic Latin American governments mean that their accuracy cannot be ensured. An example of this unpredictability can be seen in the recent secret, off-the-books meeting between Trump and two former presidents of Colombia, Álvaro Uribe and Andrés Pastrana. Between the 15th and 16th of April 2017 at the Mar-a-Lago Resort, Trump engaged in conversations with Pastrana and Uribe about “the region’s problems and Colombia’s perspectives on those problems”; it was a conversation which Pastrana himself termed as “cordial and very frank” (Ordoñez/Kumar 2017). For former presidents to campaign against the sitting President’s peace accord is problematic in and of itself, but this situation is even more troublesome when the entreaties are directed to a president deciding whether or not to approve a US \$450 mil-

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The Trump administration has implemented few policies of substance with relation to the Maduro regime despite speaking out against it with fervor. An opportunity for real multilateral cooperation may be brewing as neighboring states step up their rhetoric and international organizations like the OAS take heed.

lion package of aid to implement said peace accords (Ordoñez/Kumar 2017). Without Trump's stamp of approval on the peace agreement – an agreement Uribe and Pastrana have fought hard to halt – Colombia's future is thrown into jeopardy. The future of Venezuela is similarly in question. The Trump administration has implemented few policies of substance with relation to the Maduro regime despite speaking out against it with fervor. An opportunity for real multilateral cooperation may be brewing as neighboring states step up their rhetoric and international organizations like the OAS take heed (LaFranchi 2017). Such a multilateral effort would be advantageous to the United State because it would grant legitimacy to an agreement that would otherwise be seen as a unilateral expression of "yanqui" interference. Such a move would not be unthinkable under Trump, especially seeing as both Tillerson and Haley have called out human rights abuses and authoritarianism under Maduro. So, while there is cause for some pessimism when analyzing the future of North-South relations, it is crucial to remember that Latin America has the tools necessary to temper such a cooling. Additionally, enough opportunity windows exist between U.S. and Latin American security interests to encourage intercontinental cooperation on issues like human rights and globalization. What remains to be seen is whether or not Latin America will take advantage of the frameworks at their disposal in order to compel the United States to listen to a

region that has been systematically neglected by dozens of past U.S. presidents – Republican and Democrat alike.

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